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ABSTRACT

A research project investigated the place of educational drama methodologies in the workplace and vocational education in Australia. Through a special study unit, 10 workplace trainers volunteered to be involved as part of their course of study. The unit spanned 5 months and included 5 days of workshops exploring educational drama methodology and theory. Data were collected from the following: "before" and "after" profiles that participants wrote; participants' response to a 4-day course exploring drama methodologies; trainers' journal entries as they implemented the drama methodologies; and interviews at the end of the project and 6 months later. Data analysis showed that learning emerged as a significant theme. The findings confirmed many of the claims drama educators in schools have been making for years. The trainers found that learners liked the process and often learned more quickly than through conventional lectures. They also found, however, that what students learned was not always what the teachers thought they were teaching. In addition, trainers that learners developed self-confidence and empathy, they improved in workplace competence, and they retained information longer (KC)

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# The Nexus Between Education and Work: A Research Project and Its Practical Implications

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In the abstract of this paper I introduced the idea of psychodynamic approaches in workplace and vocational education and in school settings. Those who believe in the power of pedagogy based on psychodynamic principles have a belief that 'feeling gives life to thinking'(Arnold, 1994, 21) and many drama educators are of this ilk. There is a dynamic link between thinking and feeling and explorations in drama classrooms across Australia build on the strength and importance of this connection. Howard Gardener (1985, 294) in arguing for a more complex view of intelligence than commonly prevails, comments, 'the roots of a sense of self lie in the individual's exploration of his own feelings and in his emerging ability to view his own feelings and experiences in terms of the interpretive schemes and symbol systems provided by the culture.'

Drama in Education endeavours to develop a sense of self and of others and to explore issues and themes of direct relevance to students while developing student's understandings of the place of theatre in society and the techniques of the craft of theatre. This is done in good drama classrooms through problem solving strategies and students are required to develop both their thinking skills and their empathy toward others. These aims place educational drama well within the realm of psychodynamic pedagogy.

This paper is a description of a research project, that was designed to investigate the place of these educational drama methodologies in workplace and vocational education. At the time of writing, data analysis is proceeding but not complete. Therefore, in this paper I will explain the theoretical underpinnings of the project, the methodology employed and present some of the findings from the theoretical analysis.

## THE PROJECT

When I commenced my PhD study last year I wanted to develop the work begun through my Masters Dissertation and investigate whether educational drama methodologies currently being used in schools had a place in vocational and workplace education. I also wanted to select these methodologies, based on criteria that I had previously identified, as leading to deep engagement with the drama. I knew about the drama strategies that I wished to use through my own teaching experience and through the contact with trainers in interviews and observations that had been the foundation of my Masters thesis. What I didn't know was how these methods would be accepted by trainers in vocational and workplace education or whether they would translate into a training context at all. To develop my understandings, to change what I already 'knew', I needed to have access to those involved in training and workplace education and to the training programs they designed.

I needed a methodology that would let me get involved and that would develop my knowledge of the current training context. It seemed to me that I would best meet my aims by choosing a methodology that would allow me to get deeply involved in a few situations rather than trying to make a broad sweep of many.

I was able to negotiate a scheme where my study could be implemented through the University of South Australia where there was a Centre for Research into Education and Work. Through a special study unit ten workplace trainers volunteered to be involved as part of their course of study. The unit spanned five months and included five days of workshops exploring educational drama methodology and theory. The data was collected in several ways. At the beginning of the project all participants wrote a 'profile' of themselves and their work context. The participants attended a four day course to explore the drama methodologies I had selected. At the end of this time they wrote a response which was collected and

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included with their profile. For the next four months each trainer tried to use the methodologies in their training programs. Each person kept a journal, recording their attempts, their rationale for using drama, and a description of what had happened including the responses of participants. During this time they met in small groups to discuss problems and successes and these meetings were recorded and transcribed. I recorded observations of the trainers at work and conducted a second one day training session. At the end of the research period we met as a group to discuss the project and each persons perceptions of the usefulness of the methodologies in their particular context. This was also recorded and transcribed. Finally six months after the conclusion of the project I interviewed each trainer who had been involved to gauge their continued interest and to reassess the impact of drama in their training programs.

The project was designed as a response to an educational climate in Australia where it was perceived that educational institutions and employers needed to explore ways of developing connections with each other. In this context 'Drama in the Workplace set out to explore the possible connections between drama methods used in school based educational settings and methods used in training with a particular vocational focus.

In the past drama methodologies have infiltrated the workplace and vocational courses in the guise of experiential strategies such as role plays and other forms of simulation which attempted to get the participants to make a more personal commitment to training and develop greater knowledge about themselves and others and about their role in the workplace. However the way role play and simulation are often practiced sometimes results in only minimal commitment from the participants. (Smigiel, 1993 ) Often role play is used to practice or test a skill and there is little commitment to the role or the character being assumed. The focus is largely on the performance of a skill and not on the development of self awareness or knowledge of others and their perceptions. Role play as it is often practiced in vocational and workplace training is almost universally disliked and or feared by trainees.

In this project an attempt was made to trial methods that would improve the learning and the trainees perceptions of the use of dramatic methods. Quotes from trainer's journals demonstrate the initial feelings of their trainees about role play and about the word drama; 'You cant take the stress out of role plays.' 'I feel silly doing things like that. ' 'It's all bullshit' ' Not even my kids at kindergarten behave like this. ' However, after some experience with educational drama techniques comments recorded included; 'I told them that I had enough material for my project and if they preferred the next week could be a conventional course. The group indicated that they would like to keep the drama techniques. One person made the observation that although they found some of the exercises a bit silly, the two days without them fell that and he had difficulty concentrating on the sessions' . and from another trainer, 'By now I was experiencing a rare moment in teaching, I felt that we were all very much together as a group and that everyone was keen to learn especially me.'

DRAMA AND TRAINING

The trainers in the project workshopped a variety of strategies designed to follow models of practice where the learning through drama could be meaningful for participants. The kind of drama explored was complex, a many faceted process, a shared learning experience. The process had little in common with the kind of 'creative dramatics' which may focus on role plays based around role play cards, skills training, or working in front of a video. The program was based on a belief that for worthwhile learning to occur participants need to learn in, about and through drama.

I Through involvement in drama participants learn about themselves and others, about certain situations and even about historical perspective's. To gain real learning and understanding they need to be involved at the deepest level possible.

2 When they are taught about drama they learn skills and techniques that belong to the art form; use of space and time, understanding of body language, understanding of audience, and the ability to assume

and identify roles.

3 Through drama they refine their vocal and movement skills and their ability to work cooperatively and creatively solve problems.

Of course it must be noted that dramatic methods do not suit all training situations. The trainers involved in the project often found that they were presented with challenges to provide training for employees which related to the development of technical skills. In this case a range of instructional processes with demonstration and repetition were used. It was a challenge for some of the trainers to find situation where drama was most appropriate. One of the most difficult situations was experienced by a trainer working with trainee engineers. So much of their course required technical knowledge and skill that he found it difficult to find a place for drama methodology.

Through an earlier pilot project (Smigiel, 1993) some of the conditions necessary to achieve learning at the deepest level were identified. Participants need to be given time to warm up to the activity, they need thinking and writing time and time to discuss their current knowledge or perceptions about the topic of the drama. They need to feel relaxed within the group in which they are operating and happy with the idea of going into role. They need to have some understanding of the techniques and conventions of drama. They need to have time to develop and think about the role they are to play. Most importantly at the conclusion of any drama activity there needs to be discussion and reflection about what has occurred.

EXPERIENTIAL METHODOLOGY

These prerequisites mirror the principles of good experiential methodology, where there is a determination not to neglect the human side of learning and to acknowledge the role of affect and conation, alongside cognition. Boud and Pascoe (1978) suggest student involvement, learner control and the correspondence of the learning task to activities outside the classroom are central to any experiential learning activity.

Throughout the project, in the initial trainer's workshop and in their subsequent vocational programs these were the corner stones of the methodologies explored. The necessity of warm-up and reflection were emphasised and programs based on the needs of the trainees were encouraged. The importance of ownership of role and participant involvement in the creation of the role to be played were seen as particularly crucial. This was because of an initial perception that the playing of roles created by others and presented through role cards or character outlines works against involvement and commitment to deeper learning.

There are two major emphases in the use of drama in training which often but not always go together. One concerns performance, the other reflection. When a learner focuses on the performance dimensions of their participation in a role play or simulation game in training, he or she attends to carrying out the activities of the role carefully and accurately. In training, competent performance in simulated workplace activities such as serving in a make-believe restaurant, answering the phone, preparing a "patient" for evacuation etc may demonstrate that, at least in this simulated situation, this or that person can perform the required activities satisfactorily. The reflective dimensions of drama move the focus from the performance to the person trying on the role and attempting to integrate ideas and experiences generated by the experience into the rest of their social and personal self. It is the reflective processes which are vital if one wishes to move learning from surface to deeper engagement and ownership of role is an important requirement as a prelude to effective reflection.

' The last thing effective role playing is about is pretending, unless it is the kind of pretending little children do when they lose themselves in their play. Serious play is playful as well as being liberating. Losing oneself in role is liberating in the way that losing oneself in fancy dress is liberating. Effective role playing involves the comic as well as the romantic and tragic dimensions of behaviour; it can be based on broad

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and biased caricature as well as subtle observation and interpretation. What makes it useful dramatically and educationally is not the genre; it is whether the energy goes into living the roles or into killing them to preserve our inhibitions." (Neville, 1989, 221)

LEARNING

Throughout the data analysis phase of the project, learning, has emerged as a significant theme. This phenomena has been categorised under two headings. The first, 'Possible Learning', includes the trainer's comments about the learning environment within the training session and the second, 'Effects beyond the Session', contains the trainer's observations about the impact of drama beyond the training session. Both categories have implications for the use of drama methodology in schools and in workplace and vocational education.

The findings of the trainers involved in the project confirmed many of the claims drama educators in schools have been making for years. For example when teaching a familiar piece of curriculum using drama rather than more traditional methods, trainers found that the participants became more involved with the material and enjoyed the session more. This is evidenced in quotes such as, The strength of the methodology was the way it engaged everybody." No coercion but every incentive to join in." (Jan, wr)

'Both parties went off to conduct the interview. I stayed well out of each and scribbled enthusiastically on my papers while listening intently around the room. I discovered that these people were taking this far more seriously than any of the role plays I have conducted in the past seven years." (Deb, J, 7)

'We've just done some interim evaluation of our courses,4 or 5 weeks in to the semester and for all classes across two campuses in this program, a number of my students have said "that of all the classes we do yours is the one that we enjoy the most. We look forward to coming and we never fall asleep because there is always something happening and it's much more exciting." I'm absolutely sure that it has something to do with the drama techniques that I've been using. '(Har,I, Har, 8)

Several of the trainers were surprised to find that they could teach the same information using drama as when using other methods and they could get through the information faster. 'I could have lectured for 45 minutes trying to tell them about the perception that tourists have about countries, but in drama they could pick this up in ten minutes and there is nothing more to say. I think in attitudinal things drama is faster than posing case studies or having a discussion." (Deb,I, Nov, 9)

One of the other interesting discoveries was that the trainees could understand and work with more complex issues through drama. This point is illustrated by a nurse educator who was part of the project. 'I also noted, participants were willing to partake of cognitive challenge within their program learning activities. I was therefore able to present more complex information without undue stress of embarrassment to them or to myself." (Bev, J, 3)

This element was supported by other trainers, who wrote about the level of understanding and the grasp of the topic area. It is also an historically unexplored outcome of educational drama in schools and something worth exploring in the future.

A problem and a strength was the unpredictable nature of learning through drama. Both perspectives are demonstrated in the following quotes;

'One thing I have learnt is that I shouldn't make assumptions about the kind of learning that is going to come out of it. That is what I think is the difference between doing the 45 minute lecture on something or doing it through drama. Much more will come out of the later but what I've discovered is it is not necessarily what you thought it would be. That in itself is reason for doing it. I realise that what I think is important is not necessarily the be-all and end-all of everything. '(Har,I, Nov, 17)

' As I have already discovered during the limited times that I have attempted to use some of the drama techniques, the learning may not be as predictable as the business is looking for. (Ken, S, 2)

It is interesting that this unpredictability has been often valued and catered for in a school environment while competency based training requirements in industry make it less desirable. With a trend toward greater accountability and tighter controls on curriculum it will be interesting to see whether schools find it increasingly more difficult to acknowledge and cater for unpredictable learning in the future.

EFFECTS BEYOND THE SESSION

One of the most exciting outcomes of this project, from my point of view has been the trainers' perceptions that educational drama has an impact on participants beyond the actual session in which it is used. This more than anything else provides a strong argument for its inclusion in the repertoire of workplace and vocational educators.

In the study There were four properties identified that related to this category.

• The development of self confidence.

This property had dimensions ranging from the confidence to express opinions, as exemplified in the quotes; 'After drama they became more actively involved in discussions.' (Deb, J,6) and 'Through the drama the group started expressing opinions.' (Ken, J, 4) to the confidence to apply for work after long periods of unemployment. ' Only when we had finished did she reveal that she had a job lead which she wished to follow up and asked if we could run through a mock phone call to this employer a few times, which we did. At the conclusion of that 'G' made her call with me observing from a distance of about two metres. The employer questioned her fairly closely and then invited her for a short interview immediately. She was quick and bold enough to ask if there were other positions as she had a daughter with similar skills and experience and asked if she could come as well. A positive response resulted in us driving to the employers premises, a quick double interview (mother and daughter) and both being employed on the spot. This success was achieved after some sixteen months unemployment and almost immediately following the exercises of the Irish Parliament. 'G' in her exit interview profusely thanked both myself and the company and actually identified the Irish Parliaments as being the place where she learnt the most'(Don/j/13). Another dimension to this property was increased confidence in presentations. 'It also gave them self confidence in presenting in front of their peers, which was demonstrated when they had to present their research project to the class the following week. '(Bev,J ,5)

• Empathy demonstrated in the group and beyond the session.

The dimensions of this property were evidenced in quotes such as, 'They wrote more and appreciated other's points of view and understood their own view more after the drama. ' (Don, J, 11 ) and. 'I see so many benefits from it, not only in terms of what students learn, but how they learn, and the spin-offs of bonding and group cohesiveness that come from shared experience. '(Ha, J 21 )

All trainers wrote of this greater understanding of others extending to the workplace. 'There was an ambience of empathy and camaraderie even beyond the session. '(Bev, J, 3) Don wrote of a time when he had used drama with a group of line managers and one young man found that the experience helped him to consider the feelings of the trainees for whom he was responsible 'He just didn't realise how much influence he would have. He was only 25 and he'd never thought about it. Some of the trainers said they didn't realise the power they held over a group either. '(Don/l/J/8)

• Improvement in Workplace competence.

By the end of the trialing period, those trainers who were employed by an organisation to train employees and who had the opportunity to observe the effect of training in the work situation, observed that the

drama methods had an effect on workplace performance. Bev, a nurse educator wrote, 'I have found of the nurses I worked with during the research period, the use of drama as a learning methodology has had a profound effect upon those nurses' theoretical and clinical competence."
Ken, a trainer with a large chemical company observed, 'Feedback was positive and went beyond the session into the workplace where two supervisors changed their role in the company.'(Ken, I,15th, 2)

• greater retention of facts learnt.

This related to both the actual drama activity, evidenced in the first quote and the topic of the session as demonstrated in the second quote. This morning when I met them, they discussed the Forum Theatre for another half an hour. They were still saying things like, I wanted to get in and so and so got in and I didn't have a chance" and they were still cooking over it. It was great. The learning must have been so deep that they still had ideas and they remembered the lines "when you said such and such ".(Deb, I, Jou,4).
'Greatly increased the understanding for participants of the programs content. Forum theatre worked well allowing the participants to synthesise their learning and apply it in a hypothetical situation. It was useful feedback for the program facilitator as it provides clear practical demonstrations of what participants had learnt. '(Mic, J, 10)

'They all remembered last weeks topics especially the role plays. '(Jen, J, 13)

'I became very interested in the learning that the students displayed as we viewed the videos which they had made without any direction from me. What I perceived was that they had adopted they sort of learning we had been involved in a week ago in drama as an old sort of knowledge, not to be questioned.' (Deb, J, 13)

The greatest challenge arising from the outcomes of this project to date, is to question the place of educational drama in schools and in vocational and workplace education generally. School based educators across the world have acknowledged the importance of the development of self confidence, increased understanding of self and others, and increased understanding of situations and events through learning in and through drama. It seems that in the programs where drama was trialed in workplace and vocational education these outcomes were similar. In addition participants enjoyed their sessions and became more involved with the topic being addressed. In addition, and most importantly they retained facts learned and the results of the sessions transferred into the workplace and into their lives. This transference seems a vital indicator that drama should be explored more as a method of teaching and training in workplace and vocational education where it is imperative that training programs have relevance and impact beyond the training room. It also supports the notion that psychodynamic pedagogy, based on the dynamic relationship between thought and feeling, is a powerful way of learning.



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